

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BANJUL

USMISSION USNATO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT OF STATE PRESS BRIEFING MAY 9, 1978

FOLLOWING IS AN UNOFFICIAL, UNCORRECTED EXCERPT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE PRESS BRIEFING. IF NECESSARY OFFICIAL VERSION WILL FOLLOW.

Q. THERE ARE SOME REPORTS COMING IN THAT THE ETHIOPIANS WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF SOVIET ARMS HAVE BEGUN SUCCESSFULLY SUBDUING THE REBELLION IN ERITREA. DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ON THAT?

A. NO.

Q. AND DO YOU ATTACH ANY PARTICULAR STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE TO THE ERITREAN COAST, AND DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE DAMAGING TO THE UNITED STATES INTERESTS IF THE SOVIETS GAINED MORE OF A FOOTHOLD THERE THAN THEY NOW HAVE?

A. LET ME SAY THAT OUR GENERAL THESIS ABOUT SOVIET PRESENCE IN ETHIOPIA IS UNCHANGED AND THAT WOULD HOLD FOR ANY PART OF THAT COUNTRY. WE DO NOT THINK THAT IT IS USEFUL OR CONDUCIVE TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE AFRICAN STATES THEMSELVES FOR SUCH A MASSIVE INVOLVEMENT BY THE SOVIET UNION IN THE AFFAIRS OF ETHIOPIA. I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING BEYOND THAT. AS FAR AS THE ERITREAN FIGHTING GOES, I SAW SOME OF THOSE SAME REPORTS. IT IS NOT MY OWN INTERPRETATION THAT THE ERITREAN VARIOUS

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SECESSIONIST GROUPS ARE IN FACT BEING IN EFFECT CRUSHED AT THIS POINT -- BUT I WOULD HAVE TO SAY THAT OUR INFORMATION ON THAT IS ROUGHLY EQUIVALENT TO YOUR OWN.

Q. WELL, COULD YOU TAKE THE QUESTION ON WHETHER YOU REGARD CONTROL OF THE ERITREAN COAST AS A PARTICULAR STRATEGIC CONCERN.

A. I WILL SEE IF WE HAVE A POSITION ON THE QUESTION OF CONCERN ABOUT THE SHIPPING LANES.

Q. I WONDER ALSO AT THE SAME TIME IF YOU ARE TAKING THAT, WHETHER YOU MIGHT GIVE US SOMETHING A LITTLE BIT MORE PRECISE ON THE ERITREAN BUSINESS AND THE SOVIETS.

A. YES, I WILL SEE IF I CAN GET YOU A POSITION -- OFFICIAL POSITION ON HOW WE VIEW THE ERITREAN SITUATION GENERALLY.

Q. THE SUGGESTION WAS MADE AT THE TIME, THAT A REDUCTION IN SOVIET AND CUBAN FORCES WAS EXPECTED. APPARENTLY THAT HAS NOT HAPPENED. IN FACT, QUITE THE CONTRARY HAS

HAPPENED.

A. I WILL SEE IF I CAN GET YOU AN UPDATE ON THE POSITION ON THAT QUESTION -- THOUGH THE UPDATE WILL NOT CHANGE OUR BASIC POSITION, WHICH IS THAT THOSE FORCES SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN -- THAT THE OSTENSIBLE JUSTIFICATION FOR THEM BEING IN THE SITUATION IN THE OGADEN, HAVING BEEN TO A GREAT PART RESOLVED THAT WE BELIEVE STRONGLY THAT THAT JUSTIFICATION THAT THEY GAVE FOR THEIR PRESENCE, NO LONGER EXISTING, THAT THEY SHOULD WITHDRAW.

Q. WELL ALONG THAT POINT, DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING FURTHER ON THE REPORTS THAT THERE IS STILL CONTINUED FIGHTING IN THE OGADEN WHICH PRESUMABLY, IF THAT WERE THE CASE, UNCLASSIFIED

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WOULD GIVE THE ETHIOPIANS AND THE CUBANS AND THE SOVIET UNION AN ADDED RATIONALE FOR STAYING THERE?

A. NO, I HAVE SEEN THE SAME REPORTS OF GUERILLA ACTIVITY, BUT I DON'T HAVE MUCH BEYOND THAT.

Q. FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA, IN SOUTH AFRICA, APPEARS TO BE VERY STRONGLY CONVINCED THAT HE HAS VERY STRONG EVIDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES FUNDING AND MILITARY SUPPORT OF A SAVIMBI AS WELL AS THE SOUTH AFRICANS IN

THEIR INCURSION IN '75 AND '76 -- WHICH I UNDERSTAND WENT ALL THE WAY TO THE SUBURBS OF LUANDA. YOU HAVE TOLD US THAT THIS IS WRONG AND I JUST AM WONDERING -- ARE YOU CERTAIN IN YOUR MIND, OR HAVE YOU BEEN JUST TOLD THIS IS THE POSITION? ARE YOU QUITE CERTAIN? BECAUSE IF THEY DO BRING UP THE EVIDENCE IT COULD BE ANOTHER U-2 THING, OR SOMETHING OF THAT NATURE.

A. YOU KNOW AS USUAL, IN BOTH LOGIC AND DEBATE, I DO NOT HAVE TO PROVE A NEGATIVE. THE ASSERTION HAS BEEN MADE BY SOUTH AFRICA. SOUTH AFRICA CARRIES A BURDEN -- I DON'T.

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